

LESSON 1

THE MARINE CORPS PLANNING PROCESS

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

*“In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless,
but planning is indispensable.”*
—Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower

Lesson Introduction

This lesson introduces you to the concept of operational planning and, specifically, the Marine Corps Planning Process (MCP). You will be introduced to operational design and the three tenets of Marine Corps planning (top-down planning, the single battle, and integrated planning) and the six-step MCP.

Closely associated with the MCP is the joint planning infrastructure characterized by the Joint Operational Planning and Execution System (JOPES) and the Joint Task Force (JTF) planning process. It is important to understand that JOPES is not a planning process per se, but a system that includes joint operation planning policies, procedures, and reporting structures supported by communications and automated data processing systems. JOPES fulfills the information requirements of national and theater-level commanders and their staffs. Both the MCP and the JTF planning process provide methodologies whereby selected staffs can plan and generate key outputs, which become critical inputs into JOPES.

Student Requirements by Educational Objective

Requirement 1

Objective 1. Comprehend the concepts of operational design, top-down planning, the single battle, integrated planning, and future operations planning. [JPME 1(e), 2(d)]

Objective 2. Compare each step of the MCP and develop an understanding of the relationships between current and subsequent steps within the process. [JPME 1(e)]

Objective 3. Understand and apply the six warfighting functions in operational planning. [JPME 2(d)]

Read:

- MCDP 5, pp. 3 to 11, 34 to 35, and 63 to 65 (14 pages)
- MCDP 1-0, pp. 6-3 to 6-9 (7 pages)
- MCWP 5-1, pp. 1-1 to 1-4 and Appendix B (6 pages)
- MCDP 1-0, pp. 6-19 to 6-24 and pp. A-1 to A-4 (10 pages)

The use of warfighting functions as a method for determining and evaluating future requirements within the battlespace focuses on problem solving and commander/staff actions based on a functional approach rather than the traditional “stovepiped” staff section or military occupational specialty approach to planning. Warfighting functions offer the commander, his staff, and subordinate commanders a rapid and systematic means to analyze and synchronize the myriad activities required to plan and conduct combat operations, especially at the MEF level.

During deliberate planning, the staff may tend to coordinate and cooperate in a very pro forma or contrived way. Using warfighting functions, the staff must coordinate and cooperate because the functions do not fit “nicely” under the cognizance of any single staff section. Also, functions do not equate to tasks; for example, the function “fires” includes both aviation and ground-delivered fires. Additionally, you should consider ground and aviation elements contributing to the warfighting function of “maneuver.” This is much different than the traditional stovepiped planning of the past, which focused on the deconfliction of independently planned activities between major subordinate commands (MSCs). Now, both kinds of fires and maneuver must be planned for and coordinated more closely, not only because it is the most logical thing to do, but also because the planning process forces us to do it. It is this “warfighting function” construct that facilitates integrated planning.

Requirement 2

Objective 4. Conceptualize how the MEF and a JTF are organized to conduct future operations planning. [JPME 1(c)(e), 2(a)(d), 3(c)]

Read:

- MCWP 5-1, Appendix C (9 pages)
- Joint Pub 5-00.2, pp. IX-4 (Start at Section B. Joint Task Force Planning) to IX-14 (9 pages)

The MEF commander may organize the staff in any way desired in order to fit his command philosophy, the situation, and/or the staff capabilities and limitations. In general terms, the G-3 must be able to fight the current battle (close, deep, and rear) as well as prepare the plans needed for fighting the MEF out to the “foreseeable” future. How far is that? It depends on the situation (METT-T-SL). In approximate numbers, the G-3 current operations section may think “present to 48 hours out,” the G-3 future operations section may think and plan out to “96 hours,” and the G-5 or the future plans section of the G-3 may look “beyond 120 hours.” The G-5 must be prepared to think and coordinate in preparation for future operations beyond the G-3’s capability and in cooperation with higher headquarters, other services, and/or other nations. There will be planning overlaps because a finite or defining end to one phase or stage of an operation or campaign plan rarely exists. Additionally, no two commanders will interpret the functional descriptions of their current operations, future operations, and future plans sections the same.

The JTF staff organization for operational planning is very similar to that of the MEF. Only minor differences exist with respect to staff sections and their planning horizon focus (see p. IX-14 Joint Pub 5-00.2).

Requirement 3

Objective 5. Distinguish between the MCPP, the JTF Planning Process, and the Joint Operational Planning and Execution System (JOPES). [JPME 1(b)(c), 2(a)(d), 4(a)(e)]

Read:

- MCWP 5-1, Appendix A (3 pages)
- Joint Pub 5-00.2, pp. IX-39 (Start at 9. Joint Task Force Specific Planning Process) to IX-53 (Delete 10. Campaign Planning) (15 pages)
- Joint Pub 5-0, pp. I-7 (Start at 9. Interoperable Joint Planning and Execution System) to I-13 (Stop at 14. Assigned, Allocated, and Apportioned Forces) (7 pages)

As previously discussed, JOPES is a continuously evolving system developed through the integration and enhancement of earlier planning and execution systems. JOPES is used to monitor, plan, and execute mobilization, deployment, employment, and sustainment activities associated with joint operations. Both the MCPP and the JTF planning process are staff planning methodologies that produce outputs such as courses of action (COAs) and mission/situation assessments. These kinds of planning process outputs may eventually become inputs into JOPES, specifically Phase III (Plan Development) during JOPES deliberate planning and Phase II (Crisis Assessment) and Phase III (COA Development) during JOPES crisis action planning. You should understand these relationships while planning to avoid confusion and to maintain planning competency while planning joint operations with joint staffs or other Services.

**** View the interactive multimedia instruction for lesson #1 immediately following this lesson's summary.**

Lesson Summary

As emphasized in the Marine Corps' warfighting philosophy, maintaining an overwhelming operational tempo may be the most important aspect of combat. The ability to think and operate at a higher tempo than an opponent, combined with the ability to apply combat power at the decisive time and place, is almost unbeatable. To do this, the MEF commander must have the ability to peer into the future in order to shape the next battle and to create an untenable situation for the enemy. Applying the combined arms combat power of the MEF at a decisive point and time can create a significant dilemma for the enemy. The great difficulty is determining where and when the decisive point and time will be. A competent staff assists the MEF commander in this effort by

conducting assessments of potential plans and future operations and using the techniques of integrated planning.

JPME Summary

AREA 1					AREA 2				AREA 3					AREA 4					AREA 5			
A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D
	X	X		X	X			X			X			X				X				